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### My Connection with Nature

Overall, my connection with nature has alternated between synergistic and antagonistic. For a majority of my life, nature has helped me find a calm and internal grounding when my life seemed overly chaotic and negative. Of course, contrasting this are small things, like nearly drowning, freezing to death, and tornados. These being my most clear memories of past events I had experienced when out in nature. While my day to day life is most often found in the drudgery of civilization and social responsibility, I try to find time to connect with nature. Whether taking a trip or simply watching a sunrise or the stars, I feel the day to day struggles drift away and a calmness wash over me. Of course, the profound feeling of insignificance doesn't exactly work wonders for self-esteem, but you can't have everything. Besides, there is are sufficient feelings of insignificance awaiting final exam grades and checking bank balances, all without the allure and tranquility of nature. My experiences with my grandfather taught me the beauty of nature and the almost imperceptible higher plan for creation, the lessons learned from my grandmother taught me to double check important assumptions, my experience with tornados during the road trip with my friend Jeff taught me to value friends and loved ones, and my experience with nearly drowning taught me that nothing humans build can compare with the uncaring but majestic scope of nature.

My earliest positive memories from interacting with nature are with my grandfather, before he and my grandmother passed away four years ago. Having since retired from actual hunting after my grandmother castrated a deer during a hunting trip, he primarily went hunting or fishing only so much as it meant being in the wilderness and away from her. During these trips he would take me to learn plants and animals, recognize tracks, and learn wilderness survival skills. My grandmother, by contrast, seemed inept in natural surroundings to the very depth of her soul. She spent years hunting during deer season with only one incident of success. As referenced above, her singular victory was due to a ricochet of her rifle shell from hitting a tree, to the testicles of the buck that was expected to die of a head shot. The combination of pain and trauma led the deer to run until it bled to death, and my grandfather refused to ever go hunting with her thereafter. I learned a great deal about nature from my grandfather, and the perils of poor marksmanship from my grandmother. These memories are precious to me, first, because it meant that I was not unintentionally castrated by someone attempting to hunt a deer, and secondly because I saw not only the beauty in nature, but how everything no matter how chaotic, made sense and was part of a greater whole. The squirrels running frantically with no obvious purpose were searching for food, and the plants growing at random are in their own way doing what they have to in order to grow, survive, and flourish. Even at a young age I was often taken aback at how seldom civilized life made sense. The rat race of career, the casual and brief social interactions, and the nature of work to get more things so you have to toil longer and harder to pay for them I found very confusing. However, in nature I saw the cycles in a more primal form, the desire to growth and survive is still present, but without manmade notions of status and acceptability. I would draw parallels between swarms of fish in ponds or rivers and civilized existence, seeing the struggle and beauty in its most basic form. I was taken aback by how

without humanities self-inflicted torture in terms of social strata and financial concerns beauty was able to present itself in something so primal. While a tree, squirrel, or fish has its place in the world and acts accordingly, humans have created an artificial system designed to feed their own egos, and a lot of what is natural and beautiful is lost as a sacrifice to their own self-importance. Life has always seemed a pointless struggle, with nothing but chaos and pain as the result, however the same can be claimed in doing lunges or listening to politicians. However, in nature, I saw the ecosystems in a scale that brought the point home that no matter how convoluted life seems, it is all part of something that makes sense, even if it is not discernable at the time. At this point I felt more in tune with nature than I did with civilization.

My second most prevalent memory was in the last few years during an attempt to attend Memphis in May. My friend as well as his parents and siblings had extended the invitation to go with them to see the concerts. We left out from Missouri with the weather all in all rather beautiful. While the sky was a gloomy overcast, there were rays of sunlight breaking through, which I felt was symbolic of things getting better, and an example of the silver lining cliché. However, this temporary, and somewhat cliché, optimism was not to last. By the time we had crossed state lines into Tennessee we found gusts of wind as well as a completely overcast sky. In the field to our right we watched as five funnel clouds touched down, and were heading toward the road. At this point we were faced with the decision of whether to try to outrun them, or turn around and head back to Missouri. Deciding that the concert wasn't that great in the first place, a choice admittedly influenced by impending certain death, we opted for the latter. In the end, we stopped at a tornado free diner and simply spent time with one another, sharing jokes and stories, and enjoying one another's company, and the fact that we did not end up in Oz. So in this instance, nature drew me closer to civilization and the social web of friends and loved ones.

Of course, unfortunately for Jeff, his girlfriend at the time which had been left intentionally ignorant of our plans discovered them while we were eating, leaving us to second guess whether tornado weather was preferable to her phone conversation. Even when, as in this case, nature was destructive, it brought about change and the opportunity for further growth. Nature is in a simple state of beauty, of order and chaos, albeit with purpose. The artificial constructs of humanity build as a way to destroy, whereas outside of the civilized world destruction furthers growth. Earthquakes, tornados, and floods have the same sort of innocence, so to speak, as a bear nurturing her cub, a placid stream, or squirrels playing.

Third, and in retrospect, I had an encounter some years ago that sticks out in my mind due to it being a situation in which I felt in conflict with nature and even in a small scale felt its majesty. I was exploring a bank near a river during an overcast day, which quickly turned into a storm. Being at the edge of the river where I had climbed down to examine the fish and the plants, already having slipped on the muddy slope trying to get to my destination in the first place, I quick found myself blinded by rain and being washed into the river, which by that time had become turbulent. I climbed and I clawed and kept going under into the frigid river, desperate both to reach safety and to breathe. At that moment I felt as powerless as a leaf in a tornado, and it occurred to me even then that part of the reason that humanity builds so much and strives so hard to make themselves feel important is due to their insignificance when compared to nature as a whole. In retrospect I considered the virtue of swimming practice, and critical thinking skills, particularly as they relate to environmental factors. Ultimately, this was subverted by the capacity in middle age to generally float. We fight and we posture, build and destroy, bogging ourselves down with ultimately pointless activities to stay busy in an attempt to feel like the most important of nature's creatures. However, no matter a person's stature in life,

or their wealth, they cannot outdo nature. Whether it is simply the flow of life represented by fish swimming in a stream or a volcanic eruption, nature ultimately is far more majestic than anything humanity can contrive. I have often contemplated the endless cycle of psychological explanations for the perpetual failings of the human race as a whole. Sigmund Freud blamed the parents, Alfred Adler blamed inferiority complexes, and Karen Horney blamed basic anxiety, and so on unto the present. In this, I feel perhaps that humanity is less interested in understanding its relationship with nature, and more in justifications as to why the behavior is permissible. The assertion that man seeks to establish his superiority over nature due to an inferiority complex sounds fine on paper, but oil spills and the three in the morning Sarah McLachlan animal commercials paint the picture in less pleasant detail.

Overall, my connection to nature has ebbed and flowed over time, as I get more or less caught up in the rat race of civilization. This should be read as I immensely enjoy the natural wonder of nature, but remain obsessed with my aversion to poverty and addiction to the internet. While I find nature useful in clearing my head or making sense of life, and often breathtakingly beautiful, I never forget small things, like natural disasters. My experiences with nature in turn have led to a cautious passion for the natural world, and a greater appreciation for both the civilized world and the wilderness. In the wild, the inherent beauty is evident, in every plant and animal, and in the weather. The tranquility and destructive chaos vacillate with a simplicity that civilization cannot imitate, in a constant cycle of life and death. I see the merits in the civilized world, but also see the inherent pretense of superiority and the selfish destructiveness that exists for the sake of ego. On the other hand, we have hot pockets and toasters. Nature is simplistic and complex, but true to itself in its state, a cycle of life, death, and rebirth that simply exists.

Meaning I feel that both are great with the right approach and in the proper doses, but at the wrong time or the wrong degree, and you end up being carried to Oz or shot in the genitals.